MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

February 8, 2024

SB 98
Department of Housing and Community Development – Food Desert Study

Senate Finance Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers testimony in support of Senate Bill 98. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

SB 98 requires the Department of Housing and Community Development to conduct a study and make recommendations on reducing food deserts in the State of Maryland.

Access to nutritious food is a basic human right, and yet, far too many individuals in our communities, especially those in low-income areas, are living in what are commonly known as food deserts. These areas lack sufficient access to fresh and healthy food options, contributing to higher rates of malnutrition, chronic illnesses, and food insecurity. As Catholics, we are called to prioritize the needs of the vulnerable and work towards creating a more just and compassionate society.

This legislation is a commendable step towards understanding and addressing this issue. By requiring the Department of Housing and Community Development to study the root causes of food deserts and propose recommendations, Maryland would be taking a proactive stance in fulfilling our duty to care for those in need. Pope Francis, in his encyclical "Laudato Si," emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental and social justice issues. Food deserts not only impact the physical health of individuals but also contribute to systemic poverty and inequality. This study would demonstrate a commitment to integral human development, addressing the universal well-being of individuals and communities.

The MCC appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 98.